SOUTHERN BOULEVARD NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY





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Event Summary

The Department of City Planning and sister agencies with sponsorship by Bronx Community Boards 2 and 3, and State Assemblymember Marcos Crespo hosted an open house at Children's Aid College Prep Charter School on June 14, 2018.

Attendees interacted with materials about the study process and background, area history, demographics and more. Different topic-based stations about health, housing, open space & connectivity, land use and urban design, youth, retail and local business, and the environment provided opportunities for city agencies to discuss their current work in the area and the tools that they can bring to the study process. Also, to build on initial community engagement, community members were able to offer feedback and input on what we've heard through our outreach efforts that was summarized in the Community Input Snapshot. We heard more about what people love, existing issues and needs, and their big ideas for the area, as well as community responses to a variety of different questions posed by City agencies themselves.



At the event, participants were presented with information gathered over the course of multiple outreach events dating back to over a year ago. The most common themes were pulled out for discussion at the Open House and participants were asked to both prioritize these themes, but also to add particularly important issues that had not been previously identified or prioritized through the planning process. *The following pages describe the activities and outcomes from the open house.*

Attendees represented a wide range of local institutions and community-based organizations, including (but not limited to):

- Local Residents
- Bronx Borough President's Office
- Bronx Community Board 2
- Bronx Community Board 3
- New York City Council
- New York State Assembly
- Banana Kelly
- Boricua College
- Bronx Cooperative Development Initiative
- Bronx River Alliance
- Casita Maria

Government agencies in attendance included:

- Department of City Planning (DCP)
- Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD)
- Human Resource Administration (HRA)
- Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH)
- New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)
- Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR)

- Children's Aid Society
- Children's Aid College Prep Charter School
- Hunts Point EDC
- The Laundromat Project
- Morning Glory Garden
- Mothers on the Move
- New Yorkers for Parks
- PRC Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice
- Simone Development Companies
- Southern Boulevard BID
- South Bronx Rising Together
- Take Back the Bronx
- Urban Health Plan
- Department of Transportation (DOT)
- Department of Small Business Services (SBS)
- Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD)
- Mayor's Office of Environmental Remediation (OER)
- Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)
- Department of Design and Construction (DDC)

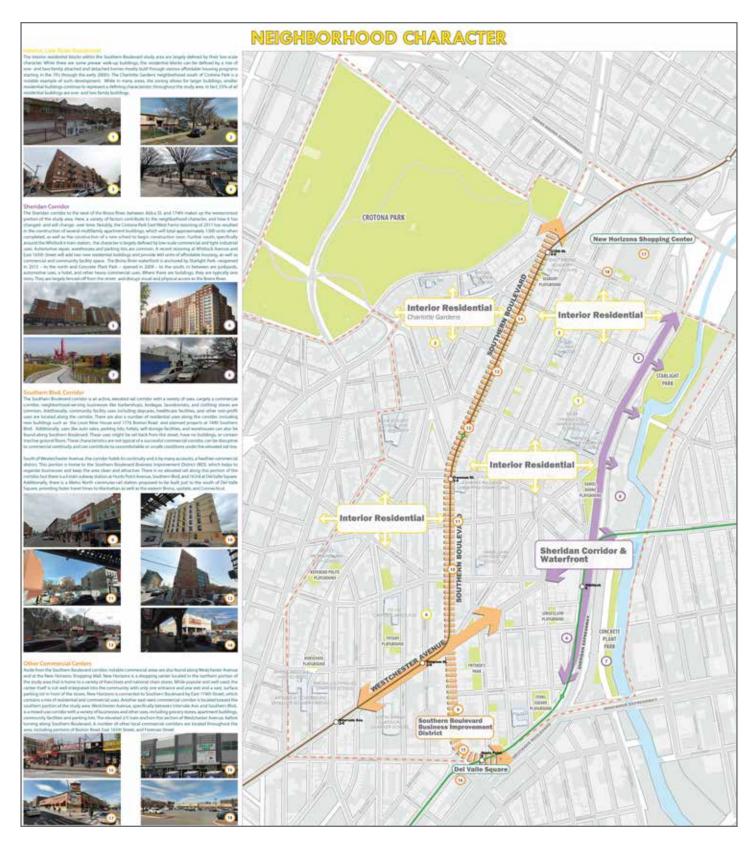




Southern Boulevard Neighborhood Study: Background

The Southern Boulevard Neighborhood Study area is generally located below Crotona Park, just west of the Bronx River. The neighborhoods within the study area, including Charlotte Gardens, Crotona Park East, and Longwood, among others, are home to nearly 60,000 resi-dents. The study area lost dramatic portions of their population in the 1970s and 1980s, but since then, the population has been increasing steadily. Among those that live there today, 43% of the residents are under the age of 25, making the study area younger than both the Borough (38%) and the city as a whole (32%). Additionally, over half of the population are Spanish-speakers. The median annual household income is just under \$24,000, lower than both the Borough (over \$34,000) and the City (just under \$53,000).

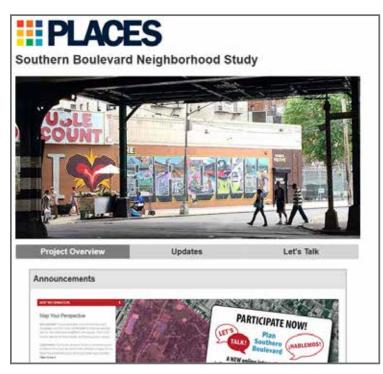
The study area is well-connected and served both by bus service as well as multiple train lines. The elevated #2 and #5 trains run through the center of the study area along South-ern Boulevard and Westchester Avenue. Additionally, the #6 subway runs along the south-eastern portion of the study area. There are a number of parks in the area, including Croto-na Park to the west of the elevated train line and Starlight and Concrete Plant Parks, both along the Bronx River. The area is also known for its rich cultural, musical, and artistic her-itage, with many famous artists and musicians having developed their craft in the commu-nities along Southern Boulevard.



All materials, including the Neighborhood Character Map (above), as well as information about the study area's demographics, economic and housing profile, and more can be found in the Southern Boulevard Neighborhood Study Virtual Open House at: <u>NYC.GOV/SOUTHERN</u>



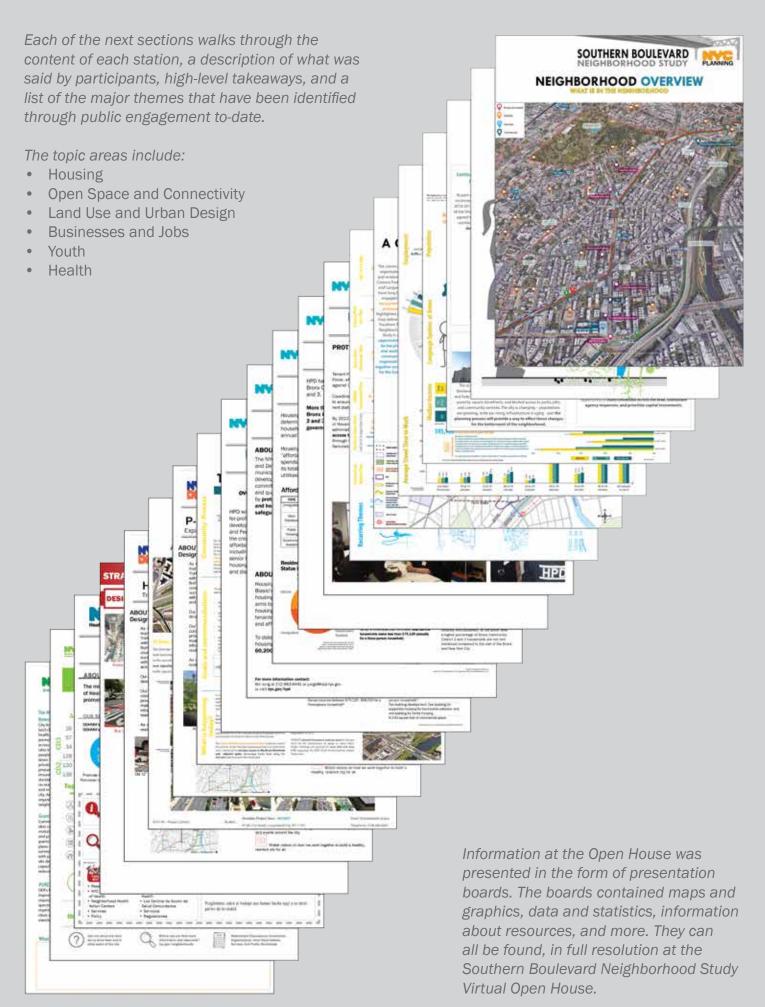
Couldn't make the open house in person? No problem. All of the materials, as well as the community input exercises can be viewed and replicated at the Southern Boulevard Neighborhood Study Virtual Open House, found at: **NYC.GOV/SOUTHERN**



To view all of the presentation material, and photographs of the board notes, navigate to the Virtual Open House tab at nyc.gov/southern.



To participate in the exercises from the open house, navigate to the Southern Boulevard Neighborhood Study's Let's Talk! Page, by following the link at nyc.gov/southern





Housing Station Summary

At the housing station, participants were able to connect with representatives of HPD, HRA and NYCHA to discuss housing-specific issues that mattered to them. Presentation material at the station included boards that provided housing-related information on Bronx Community Districts 2 and 3, and showcased HPD projects in those Community Districts. Boards also described HPD programs and initiatives, including how the agency develops new affordable housing and preserves existing affordable housing.

What did we hear?

Participants conveyed a range of concerns and were interested in many topics, but housing affordability and building repairs were repeated themes. HPD also provided an exercise asking participants to answer questions about housing in their neighborhood, and asked for feedback on housing-related statements made by the community during previous Study outreach efforts. Participants agreed that affordable housing for lower-income residents is needed, and that homelessness should be addressed. They also agreed there was a concern about real-estate speculation, gentrification, and displacement.

- · Affordable housing is needed, but affordable for whom?
- · Homelessness, especially among families with children, should be addressed
- Buildings are in need of repair

LET'S TALK!

At the Open House, participants had the opportunity to reflect on, and begin to prioritize, some of the major themes that have emerged through community engagement to-date. Attendees were asked to place a dot next to the themes most important to them. In addition to top-level themes that have been identified through the process, participants were also asked to provide additional comments, questions and ideas.

- Affordable housing is needed for all incomes, but affordable housing for lower-income residents is still the greatest need
- Homelessness, especially among families with children, should be addressed
- There is a concern about real-estate speculation, gentrification, and displacement
- Some residential buildings are in a poor state of repair and have outstanding violations
- There is fear that tenant harassment is taking place in the neighborhood
- Affordable housing should serve a wide range of needs, such as large families and people with disabilities
- Residents want more information and discussion on housing policies such as housing lotteries, financing programs, and rent stabilization







All of the responses can be viewed, in full resolution on the Southern Boulevard Neighborhood Study Virtual Open House at <u>NYC.GOV/SOUTHERN</u>



Open Space, Connectivity and Environment Station Summary

At the Open Space and Connectivity station, as well as at the Environment station, participants were able to connect with representatives of the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Department of Transportation as well as the Mayor's Office of Environmental Remediation and Department of Environmental Protection. Presentation material at the stations included boards about open space and connectivity-related programming, asset maps of parks in the neighborhood, information about DOT's Vision Zero program, as well as information about the tools and design elements they use to ensure safer and more enjoyable streets Additionally, At the Environment station, participants were able to connect with representatives of DEP and OER to discuss environment and infrastructure, specific issues that mattered to them. Presentation material at the station included boards that described remediation, OER cleanup projects, the NYC Clean Soil Bank, and community grants

What did we hear?

Participants conveyed a range of concerns and were interested in many topics. However, connectivity and access to parks on the Bronx River were repeated themes. Parks also provided an exercise asking participants to identify what they would like to see in their local parks. Through this exercise, we learned that the vacant tennis courts at Printer's Park are not fully utilized. Furthermore, Crotona Park is an important asset to the neighborhood. Improving the water quality of Indian Lake would expand the programming options at the park. At the Transportation station, participants were eager to learn more about the State's plans for redesigning the Sheridan Expressway. More information on that project can be found here: https://www.dot.ny.gov/southbronx/sheridan/public-outreach

- Connectivity to parks
- Accessibility to Bronx River Greenway
- Desire to learn more about the plans for the Sheridan Expressway
- · Information about the environmental remediation process and projects

LET'S TALK!

At the Open House, participants had the opportunity to reflect on, and begin to prioritize, some of the major themes that have emerged through community engagement to-date. Attendees were asked to place a dot next to the themes most important to them. *In addition to top-level themes that have been identified through the process, participants were also asked to provide additional comments, questions and ideas.*







PARKS & OPEN SPACE

- Connections and access to existing parks could be improved, especially with additional green space
- · Existing parks are a huge asset in the area
- · Existing parks could be better maintained
- Add new amenities such as exercise and sports facilities, and programming especially geared towards youth
- · Need more and better lighting and safety

CONNECTIVITY

- Parking can be difficult to find in some areas, especially within the Southern Blvd BID
- Some streets can be dangerous and confusing for pedestrians, cyclists and/or motorists
- It is convenient to walk places, but sidewalks can be in disrepair and feel poorly lit & dirty
- Transit access is great, but some bus lines can be unreliable



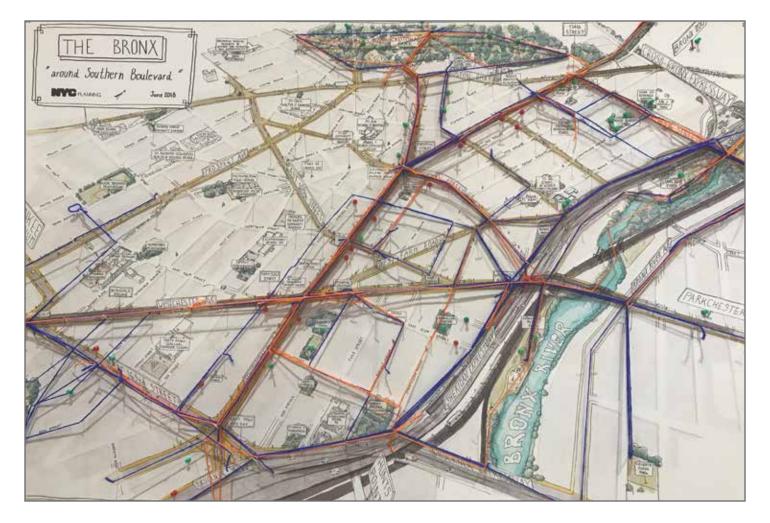
Urban Design Station Summary

Department of City Planning's Urban Design station featured an interactive map to help the City better understand how people get around and what makes that easy and difficult around the Southern Boulevard study area. The team created a hand-drawn neighborhood map featuring key destinations to help orient and call attention to community assets. Participants were invited to answer a series of questions about how they typically get around on weekdays and weekends. Their results were documented in real-time across the neighborhood map using colored thread.

What did we hear?

The information highlighted the most traveled routes and documented many reactions to the challenging conditions the participants typically encounter, such as problematic intersections, poor lighting and other areas where participants felt unsafe for a variety of reasons. Nearly 50% of participants walk along Southern Boulevard at some point during their weekly routine. Other well-traveled corridors represented were Westchester Avenue at 36% and both the Sheridan and Louis Nine Boulevard at 20%. As was expected, the parks in the area (especially Crotona Park) serve as primary key destinations for the community with almost 70% of participants noting that they feel comfortable in these public spaces. The most negatively reported spaces within the public realm were at Southern Blvd and Jennings Street, and the Westchester and Whitlock Avenue intersection.

The Department of City Planning will continue to build a more comprehensive representation of the surrounding community's movement patterns. This information will provide a great transition into more-focused engagement opportunities with local stakeholders in the coming months.



- Of those surveyed, nearly half walk along Southern Boulevard as part of their weekly routine
- Most community members (70%) find their local parks to be comfortable and a primary neighborhood asset
- Many participants noted opportunities for enhanced access to open spaces, specifically more-inviting park boundaries and safer nearby intersection crossings



This brochure was used during the Open House to invite participants to log their daily mobility routine



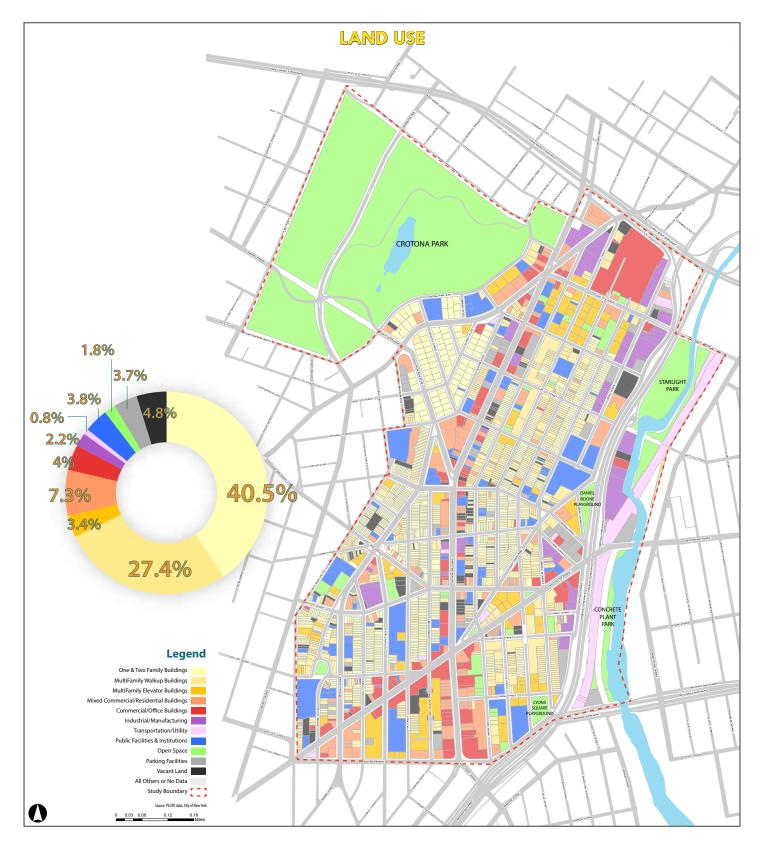
Land Use and Zoning Station Summary

Department of City Planning presented a number of materials related to land use and zoning. Large format land use, zoning and neighborhood character maps were on display and used to help inform participants about the types of uses in the area, and what zoning districts are mapped throughout. Additionally, information on what zoning does and does not do was available, which helped to clarify how zoning can permit or restrict certain uses, and how it controls the size and shape of buildings.

What did we hear?

DCP staff engaged participants in conversations about the character of the neighborhoods within the study area, and how land uses (in combination with other factors) contribute to that character. Many of the participants were curious as to how the Southern Boulevard Neighborhood Study would impact the land uses and zoning districts in the area and how decisions about zoning were made. They were informed that the study does not have any specific zoning recommendations at the moment, but that zoning, as a topic, would continue to be explored through the planning process.

- · Participants had many questions about how zoning works
- Many were interested in how the Southern Blvd Neighborhood Study planning process may inform zoning in the area
- Participants had questions about the relationship between land use and zoning
- Participants were interested in hearing about zoning changes that have occurred in the area within the last few years



All materials, including the Land Use Map (above), as well as information about the study area's demographics, economic and housing profile, and more can be found in the Southern Boulevard Neighborhood Study Virtual Open House at: <u>NYC.GOV/SOUTHERN</u>



Businesses & Jobs Station Summary

At this station, participants were able to connect with representatives of SBS to discuss their shopping experience in the Southern Boulevard Commercial Corridor. This was done through a mapping activity as well as a presentation of the findings of the recently compiled Commercial District Needs Assessment (CDNA)*. The CDNA, produced in partnership with local community based organizations – The Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation (WHEDco), Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice (YMPJ), and the Southern Boulevard BID – used merchant and consumer surveys to identify key strengths, challenges and opportunities within the commercial corridor. Presentation materials at the station included boards that described these findings, such as business landscape, business outlook, conditions of the physical environment and characteristics of area merchants. In order to better highlight the CDNA report and engage participants in its findings, SBS facilitated an activity that asked community members to identify areas on a map where their shopping experience was impacted by issues including vacant storefronts, crosswalks, and street/underpass lighting. Participants were asked to give feedback, and were encouraged to provide comments on corridor qualities not represented in the CDNA.

*The full CDNA report is expected to be published and released to the public by the end of July 2018.

What did we hear?

Through this exercise, we learned that participants are concerned with the impact of changes in the neighborhood will have on small businesses and the affordability of the commercial corridor as a whole. Community members advocated for policies that protected small businesses while also improving the overall quality of life within the corridor. For example, walkability was a major concern for participants, who identified lack of street lighting, hazardous construction elements as well as the absence of working crosswalks as issues that deterred shopping in the commercial corridor. In addition, participants shared their desire for more options and variety in business types. For example, more family-style restaurants and affordable grocery stores. Ensuring the protection of small "Mom and Pop" businesses was emphasized in this exercise. Finally, community members did share their interest in the creation of a vending plaza as well as the establishment of community cooperatives.

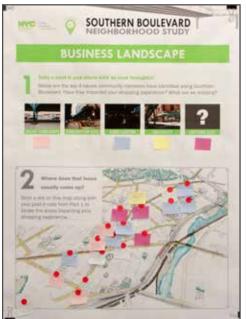
Major Takeaways:

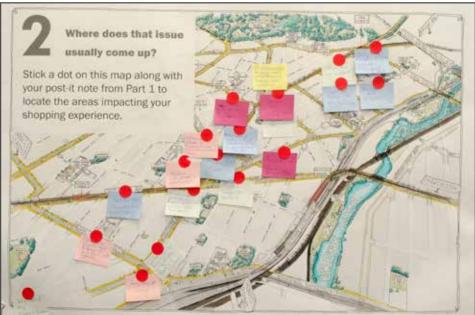
- Infrastructure investments and quality of life improvements within the corridor must be partnered with policies that secure the integrity of small businesses and the affordability of the commercial corridor
- Walkability concerns such as lack of street lighting and poorly maintained (or absent) crosswalks
 makes it dangerous to shop along the Southern Boulevard corridor. This is particularly true at night and during times of heavy traffic.
- Ongoing construction has served as a physical and psychological barrier for patronizing small businesses. It has made it difficult to maneuver around the corridor.

LET'S TALK!

At the Open House, participants had the opportunity to reflect on, and begin to prioritize, some of the major themes that have emerged through community engagement to-date. Attendees were asked to place a dot next to the themes most important to them. In addition to top-level themes that have been identified through the process, participants were also asked to provide additional comments, questions and ideas.

- High retail vacancy rate with a lack of sit down restaurants and entertainment options
- Types, variety, and convenience of shopping, food, mom & pop, and local stores are viewed as assets in the community
- Often there are too many of the same type of store in the area such as liquor, dollar, and fast food stores
- The quality of stores could be improved especially grocery, restaurant, and clothing







Youth Station Summary

At this station, participants were able to connect with representatives of DYCD to discuss youth and community development and services in the study area. Presentation material at the station included feedback boards and promotional materials about DYCD, including Youth Connect brochures, DYCD directories for programs located in Southern Boulevard, and small incentives for participants (pens, notebooks, post-it notes).

What did we hear?

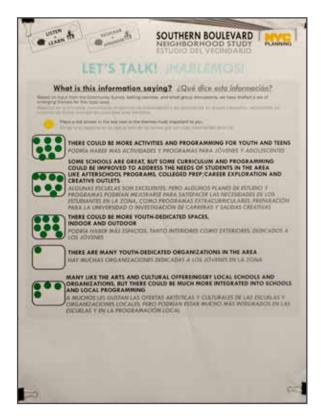
Participants conveyed a range of concerns, particularly regarding school quality and programming to enhance learning. Additionally, the need for civic education, programs to address bullying and gang involvement, and interesting activities for youth that would incorporate STEM activities (i.e., coding, robotics, gaming) were repeated themes.

- Lack of familiarity with existing programs and community centers in the community;
- · High interest in improving education and expanding afterschool programming
- Desire for more youth-dedicated spaces (indoor and outside)

LET'S TALK!

At the Open House, participants had the opportunity to reflect on, and begin to prioritize, some of the major themes that have emerged through community engagement to-date. Attendees were asked to place a dot next to the themes most important to them. In addition to top-level themes that have been identified through the process, participants were also asked to provide additional comments, questions and ideas.

- There could be more activities and programming for youth and teens
- Some schools are great, but some curricula and programming could be improved to address the needs of students in the area like afterschool programs, college prep/career exploration, and creative outlets
- There could be more youth-dedicated spaces, indoor and outdoor
- Many like the arts and cultural offerings by local schools and organizations, but there could be much more integrated into schools and local programming
- There are many youth-dedicated organizations in the area







Health Station Summary

At this station, participants were able to connect with representatives of DOHMH to talk about what creates health, and what makes it hard to stay healthy in their neighborhood, as well as specific issues that mattered to them. Presentation material at the station included boards that described DOHMH's blueprint, Take Care New York, which considers health across four broad categories: Promoting Healthy Childhoods, Creating Healthier Neighborhoods, Supporting Healthy Living, and Increasing Access to Quality Care. Materials also described DOHMH's commitment to addressing racism as a root cause of poor health.

DOHMH also provided two exercises asking participants to identify the root causes of neighborhood health concerns, and to talk about the past, present, and future of their neighborhood's health.

Through this exercise, we learned that many residents see health as a social justice issue, and can easily connect the dots between policies, systems, and their impact on health. Some residents see the neighborhood's history of advocacy and activism as an important foundation for building a healthy future. Finally, we learned that residents have a strong desire to share their stories of how the neighborhood used to be, as we begin to plan for how it will be in the future.

What did we hear?

Participants conveyed a range of concerns and were interested in many topics. However, increasing access to healthy food, and addressing environmental justice issues, including air quality were repeated themes.

Major Takeaways:

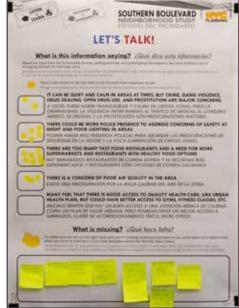
- Health is a social justice issue. Creating healthy neighborhoods means looking holistically at policies, systems, and environments and considering how they impact people.
- The neighborhoods along Southern Boulevard have been actively working to improve the health of their community for a long time by working to increase access to healthy food and advocating for cleaner air.
- Residents are most concerned about chronic diseases, diabetes, and cancer, as well as asthma and mental health.

LET'S TALK!

At the Open House, participants had the opportunity to reflect on, and begin to prioritize, some of the major themes that have emerged through community engagement to-date. Attendees were asked to place a dot next to the themes most important to them. In addition to top-level themes that have been identified through the process, participants were also asked to provide additional comments, questions and ideas.

- There are too many fast food restaurants and a need for more supermarkets and restaurants with healthy food options
- There could be more police presence to address concerns of safety at night and poor lighting in areas
- There is a concern of poor air quality in the area
- It can be quiet and calm in areas at times, but crime, gang violence, drug dealing, open drug use, and prostitution are major concerns
- Many feel that there is good access to quality health care, like Urban Health plan, but could have better access to gyms, fitness classes, etc.







What's Next?

A neighborhood study is a way to bring city investments, services, and improvements to meet current and future needs of the area that you, your neighbors, city agencies and other stakeholders have identified together through a public process. A study results in a broad plan for a defined area such as a corridor, neighborhood or series of neighborhoods. The plan identifies strategies to meet needs for things like schools, parks, streets, sidewalks, lighting, transit, services, programs, safety, job training, affordable housing, and growth.

The next phase of the process is to vision and plan by collectively developing goals, visions, strategies, and recommendations to create a plan for the future of the communities around Southern Boulevard. First in September, there will be a public goal-setting workshop to prioritize broad issues and goals and set the direction for the various planning topic areas that will be addressed in the plan (housing, parks, jobs, etc.) In October, there will be a public visioning or mapping of the goals to create a roadmap for the study process. Following that, there will be public workshops and meetings on specific topics which could include housing, jobs & local businesses, for example. The workshops would support the development of strategies and recommendations.

How can I continue to participate and voice my opinion?

Your participation is important so please sign up for regular updates and to learn about upcoming public events at nyc.gov/southern. The planning process will include a wide range of public events, public workshops, surveys, focus groups, small-group discussions, and Let's Talk! Plan Southern Boulevard, DCP's NEW online interactive tool. Outreach will be conducted in English and Spanish.





Participants review materials from June 14th's Open House









Vision + Plan

ioning, Developing Strategies & Recommendations





Implement

Capital Improvements
Program Development
ULURP